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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of contextual factors in providing quality early care and education services, focusing on program models from Aboriginal/First Nation settings in four countries. Methods included a search of published literature from mainstream and Aboriginal sources, an electronic search of unique Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples sources, intervenor briefs, public testimony, and personal interviews. The findings indicated that mainstream literature, dominated by U.S. work, focuses on the effects of child care, quality, and context. Aboriginal literature, international in scope, focuses on cultural and linguistic issues, community development, Aboriginal child care needs, and strategies. Systems and models for delivering early childhood services for Aboriginal children in four countries are described. Kenya's system prompts communities to define their needs and create programs to meet those needs, and serves an indigenous and varied population. New Zealand's system has been successful in providing quality services for Maori children but has not been able to provide a context for effective transitions. In the United States, the Child Care Bureau provides support for tribal child day care, and the American Indian Programs Branch of the Head Start Bureau supports comprehensive child development programs for Alaska Natives and American Indians. Federal government initiatives in Canada have resulted in an increase in early childhood programs for Aboriginal children. Based on the study, it was concluded that examples from Kenya and New Zealand highlight the importance of focusing discussion on planning and policies before programs are launched to ensure that contextual factors, including a supportive infrastructure and community and family supports, are in place. (Contains 27 references.) (KB)

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POSTER PRESENTATION

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Contextual Factors that Support Developmental Transitions: An International Perspective With Examples from Aboriginal/First Nations Programs

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CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT SUPPORT DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSITIONS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE WITH EXAMPLES FROM ABORIGINAL/FIRST NATIONS PROGRAMS

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CONTEXTUAL FACTORS THAT SUPPORT DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSITIONS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE WITH EXAMPLES FROM ABORIGINAL/FIRST NATIONS PROGRAMS

This presentation focuses on the role of contextual factors in the provision of quality services for children and families. It explores the thesis that programs only provide for effective developmental transitions when they receive support from contextual factors which, in turn, are supported by a framework or system that is endorsed by a broad social and political constituency. In the process, it reviews findings from a literature search and assesses program models from Aboriginal/First Nations settings in four countries. In addition, it builds on, and updates, research presented in an earlier study, *Child Care Literature Search and Recommendations* (Colbert, 1996), for Canada's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), and explored further in a later article (Colbert, 1999), arising from a presentation at a conference on Child Care and the Family-Work Balance in Toronto, Canada, in May 1998.

THE ORIGINAL MANDATE

Launched by the Government of Canada in 1991, the Royal Commission explored all aspects of Aboriginal life in Canada. Commissioners travelled throughout the country, from coast to coast to coast, to hear the views of a wide variety of people with an interest in the life of Aborginal peoples (including Indians (on and off reserve), Métis and Inuit). They accepted intervenor briefs and commissioned research papers on a wide variety of topics, including the child care report which is the basis of this presentation (Colbert, 1996). The original RCAP mandate for this report requested a response to four questions:

1. What does research/literature say about the most appropriate forms of early childhood care and education, and in what respects does the literature on Aboriginal situations differ from the mainstream?

2. With particular attention to the longitudinal studies that have been carried out ... what does the literature say about the significance and impact of appropriate forms of early childhood education? What is the cost of not providing appropriate forms of early childhood education?

3. What innovative models of Aboriginal care have been developed in Canada, the United States and elsewhere? Each model should be described and its strengths and weaknesses identified.

4. Taking into account the available literature, as well as information sources unique to the Royal Commission ... what conclusions can be drawn about the issues pertaining to Aboriginal Care in Canada? What policy directions should the Royal Commission consider?

THE METHOD

Research carried out in 1994 for the original RCAP study involved three activities: a search of published literature from both mainstream and Aboriginal sources; an electronic search of unique RCAP sources, including other commissioned research, intervenor briefs, public submissions and testimony; and personal interviews. Additional information has since been acquired from literature and personal interviews.

Steps in the research process included defining key terms, reviewing literature from all sources, identifying models, and analysing findings to provide conclusions, recommendations and comments.

KEY TERMS

For purposes of this research study, "child care" was defined as care for less than 24 hours for children under 12 years. More properly described as early care and education, such care ideally meets four types of need: economic, educational, cultural and linguistic, and social. As discussed further below, a "model" was assumed to include both a supportive "framework" or system, and specific local programs (Judith Evans, 1990).

WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

Mainstream literature is dominated by work from the United States. It focuses on the effects of childcare, the significance of quality, and the context. In contrast, Aboriginal literature is international in scope and focuses on cultural and linguistic issues and

community development, distinctive Aboriginal child care needs and goals, and strategies that have been implemented in particular communities. It is limited by the fact that few major research studies have been carried out in Aboriginal settings and there is no comprehensive assessment of the findings that have been reported. Several publications, however, have chapters on child care in developed and developing countries and/or attempt cross-national assessments that include information about Aboriginal programs. The exception is New Zealand, where Maori child care initiatives are well-documented and have been influential elsewhere.

MORE ABOUT MAINSTREAM LITERATURE

A search of mainstream early childhood literature reveals that the appropriateness of early childhood services is largely determined by two elements: program quality, which recognizes developmental and cultural dimensions; and the environment, which includes factors that provide contexts for developmental transitions such as linkages with other services, the family and the community. Further, the long-term benefits of early intervention appear to be confirmed by findings of both the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies and the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study. In fact, researchers in the Perry Preschool Study have concluded that after 27 years, program costs of $12,356 have been offset by savings of $108,002 with a net benefit to society of $95,646 for each child who participated in the program [1992 US$, discounted at 3%] (Schweinhart, et al, 1993).

Much has been written about the characteristics of high quality care, not only in the United States, but in other countries as well. As a group, researchers from around the world appear to agree on the basic characteristics of high quality care, as well as their transferrability from one setting to another (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995).

Research into the role of the environment was stimulated by the work of Ure Bronfenbrener in the 1960s and 70s and has since been endorsed by many others, including British commentator Martin Woodhead (1988) who, in view of claims about the benefits of child care, cautions that evaluations of early childhood programming must also take into account the long-term influence of other processes in the community and school.

Commentators with an international perspective on early childhood programming have examined those processes and attempted to define the significance of both integrated services and community involvement. Judith Evans (1990) of the Aga Kahn Foundation, whose research shows that integrated programs are more successful than programs with a single focus, emphasizes the importance of accountability. She explores a number of terms, such as "liaison," "cooperation," "coalition," "federation" and "unification," for expressing the relationship among services, and points to the need for programs to be "in-step" with other services in the community. Alfred Wood (1990) of the Bernard Van Leer Foundation in The Netherlands uses the terms "development," "involvement," and "mobilization," to characterize three types of relationship between services and the community. Meanwhile, the importance of the family, long acknowledged and recently reaffirmed by the Quality 2000 initiative (Kagan, 1997), is explored in more detail by researchers such as Zigler and Muenchow(1992), and Wood (1990).

Issues related to linkages involve both connections and the absence of connections. Attempts to establish linkages with other services can lead to effective comprehensive programs for children, or highlight a lack of services, including an absence of the opportunity structures that are often required for developmental transitions. The value of positive connections and the effect of either inappropriate connections or an absence of connections is clearly illustrated in programs for Aboriginal peoples who, as cultural minorities within mainstream populations throughout the world, struggle to establish and sustain high quality, culturally appropriate programs within essentially "foreign" contexts where the potential for linkages is often very low.

Before examining specific programs more closely, with a view to identifying specific models of care, it is important to establish what is meant by the term "model." Judith Evans (1990) cautions that commonly accepted "models" are really sets of strategies that may or may not be part of a larger whole. She defines a true early childhood intervention model as "a framework (plan) that provides the theoretical underpinnings for the creation of a program that is built upon locally and tested for appropriateness." Extending Evans' comment, it may be that "true 'models' accommodate child care 'systems' that make provision for many functions and are capable of supporting linkages with other services" (Colbert, 1996).

Although characteristics of the "theoretical underpinnings" are largely derived from mainstream research, they appear to be required for programs for both general populations and specific cultural groups. Without such a framework, and without a system of support, it is difficult, if not impossible, to sustain effective early childhood programs or optimize future benefits for participants. In addition, it seems that effective systems are almost always national in scope and derive support from a broad population base and access to resources and expertise that cuts across many disciplines.

SYSTEMS AND MODELS

Countries that have established systems for the delivery of early childhood services for Aboriginal children include Kenya, New Zealand, the United States and, most recently, Canada.

KENYA

The child care system in Kenya was carefully designed from 1972-1982 under the Preschool Education Project funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation (Kabiru, 1993). It was inspired by a general spirit of self-help or *harambee* that prompted communities to define their own needs and create programs to meet those needs. It serves an indigenous population, speaking many languages and living in varied conditions in both urban and rural settings.

Administrative responsibility for the system is located within the Ministry of Education. The system is also affiliated with the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) which has links to the University of Nairobi. Decision-making and support occurs within a decentralized structure that includes

- the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) which provides national support for training, curriculum development, program administration, regulation and evaluation;
- a number of District Centres for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) which accommodate local decision-making; and

- local communities which make decisions and, along with external paratners like UNICEF and the Bernard van Leer and Aga Kahn Foundations, provide the vast majority of the system's resources.

In addition, depending on local needs, the system encourages partnerships with other groups providing programs relating to feeding, health and education services.

NEW ZEALAND

The child care system developed in New Zealand to serve the Maori within a dominant mainstream culture has been influential at home and had a significant effect on care in other countries (Fleras, Smith). Inspired by the Maori's standing tall philosophy, *Tu Tangata,* it was introduced in 1982 to support *Te Kohanga Reo* or language nests. According to the 1993 *1993 Official New Zealand Yearbook,*

> *a* Kohango Reo *is a* whanau *(family base where a deliberate effort is made to create a Maori cultural environment, in which Maori language values and customs are naturally acquired by preschool children from their* kaumatua *(elders). Through the example of the* whanau, *the children learn* aroha *(love, compassion)*, manaakitanga *(caring, hospitality)*, whanaungatanga (*family responsibilities) and are taught traditional knowledge, crafts and customs, all through the medium of the Maori language.*

Within a decade, the *kohanga reo* movement was successful in bringing about social and political change within communities and the country, and providing bilingual, bicultural early childhood education for Maori children.

The system falls within the responsibility of the New Zealand government's Department of Maori Affairs. It is administered nationally by the *Te Kohango Reo Trust (Inc)* which sets quality standards, offers training, funds and charters *Te Kohango Reo* which may also be licensed by the Department of Education. In fact, the system is parallel to the unplanned, mainstream system administered by the Department of Education which is responsible for licensing, funding, training and technical assistance, and chartering of child care services.

On the one hand, the success of the system supports the thesis that contextual factors play an important role in the provision of quality services. On the other, the fact that less than

5% of the 10,000 children attending *Te Kohanga Reo* in 1992 would to on to schools where Maori has the same status as English — largely because of outstanding political issues in other areas — highlights the consequences when the context is unable to provide for effective transitions (Holmes, 1992).

UNITED STATES

In the United States tribal and mainstream programs for children and families are administered within the same two "systems," each in its own bureau within the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, various). Tribal arrangements are usually made on a "government" to "government" basis. Only a few non-profit programs are funded through state or regional offices.

The Child Care Bureau

The Child Care Bureau provides support for tribal child day care for parents who are working or going to school through the Child Care and Development Fund (established in 1990 as the Child Care and Development Block Grant). In the current fiscal year (FY2000), there are 257 grantees comprising 500 tribes (tribes with fewer than 50 children under 13 apply as part of a consortium). At least 17 "large tribes," such as the Cherokee Nation, receive more than $250,000 and are administered like states. Total funding FY2000 is $70 million (up from $27.75 million in 1996). When the original RCAP research was carried out in 1994, this was the only ongoing funding stream, on a national scale, supporting child day care (as opposed to child development and family support programs) in the four countries surveyed.

The Head Start Bureau

Through its American Indian Programs Branch in Washington, D.C., the Head Start Bureau supports comprehensive child development programs for Alaska Natives and American Indians across the country. The system, which began with part-time programs in 1964, now provides for full-year/full-day Head Start programs and, since 1994, has also supported Early Head Start for families with infants and toddlers. Head Start services are provided in six areas: education, health, nutrition, disabilities, social services and

parent participation. Although programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of individual communities, they must meet Head Start Performance Standards and benefit from operating within a national framework that functions as a support for the delivery of training and technical assistance to local programs.

Many American Indian Head Start programs are well-established and have had a significant influence on both individuals and their communities. Between 1965 and 1968, 65 tribes launched summer Head Start programs, which were later expanded into today's expanded programs. By the spring of 1998, there were 149 American Indian Head Start grantees in 26 states and 14 Early Head Start programs, serving over 21,000 American Indian and Native Alaskan children (3.4% of the total Head Start enrolment). Funding for American Indian Head Start programs in FY1998 reached over $121 million.

The Systems Together

Although dual funding streams complicate service delivery, both are accompanied by well-established systems that can be enhanced to accommodate expansion and provide support through training and technical assistance. Children who receive child care funding are also eligible for Head Start programs and funding from the Child Care Bureau is often used to support "wrap-around" services to allow tribes to provide full-day, full-week care for Head Start children, as well as care for children not eligible for Head Start. In FY1997, the two streams provided over $173 million and in FY2000 it is likely that support for American Indian early childhood programs will exceed $200 million.

Program Models

Program models (Colbert, 1996; personal communication, Locust, 2000), with specific organizational or program features, from these two systems included

- the Child Care and Development, Even Start and Head Start programs operated by the Cherokee Nation at the James Danielson Children's Village in Tahlequah, OK,

as well as programs offered by six other Head Start grantees.

- Blackfeet Tribe Head Start, Browning, MT
- Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Head Start Delegate Agency, Dakota Transitional, Rapid City, SD
- Lummi Indian Business Council Head Start, Bellingham, WA
- Navajo Department of Head Start, Window Rock, AZ
- Nevada Inter-Tribal Council, Reno, NV
- Tanana Chiefs Conference Inc, Fairbanks, AK.

CANADA

Submissions to Canada's Royal Commission provided evidence of demand for child care to meet a full range of needs. Stories of frustration and disappointment emerged. For example, speaking to commissioners in Ottawa in November 1993,

- Martha Flaherty stated that women want "opportunities." "Day care," she said, "will give us opportunities like men have."
- Martha Greig said that "what we want is a day care. That's a guarantee that at least somebody will be there, at least 8:00 to 5:00 ...". "We want to make sure there would be a proper day care, so that we will be at ease ... instead of worrying."

In her case study of child care in Pangnirtung, Gwen Reimer tells of the remote arctic community's struggle to establish a day care centre in 1990 and its failure one year later. She quotes from the story of Looie Mike, a former day care manager. The struggle, as paraphrased in the RCAP report, was fraught with frustration and failure. Two excerpts will serve as examples:

> *The government would not support either the child care centre or Looie Mike's training. No one came to help the community establish or run the centre; yet they had to run it according to government regulations....*

and

> *The government insisted that the community have a committee but the local day care committee had "absolutely no idea how to run a day care." Looie Mike said there were two levels of knowledge, "None and mine." The committee, however, had the authority, even though it was "in the dark." Members were not used to "policies, rules, administration, and proposals."...*

At that time, a review of these and other comments led to the disappointing conclusion (Colbert 1996) that "in general, RCAP submissions portray Aboriginal child care as a "pastiche," with pockets of excellence and achievement largely overshadowed by a lack of resources and jurisdictional conflicts."

Since that time, although no national child care system has been created for Aboriginal (or mainstream) children, initiatives from at least three federal government departments — Indian and Northern Affairs, Human Resources Development and Health Canada — have resulted in an increase in early childhood programs for Aboriginal children across the country. All but one province now has agreements providing for licensed on-reserve child day care.

Furthermore, the American Indian Head Start program in the United States has inspired Health Canada to develop two, very new Aboriginal Head Start Programs in Canada (one serving off-reserve Indian, Inuit and Métis families, and another other for on-reserve Indians) (Heath Canada (various); personal communication, LaVallee, 2000). These programs promise stable funding as well as ongoing technical assistance and linkages to other services. They focus on child and family development and each is tailored to meet the needs of its local community. All off-reserve AHS programs must have six program components: Aboriginal cultures and languages, education, nutrition, health promotion, social support, parent and family involvement. Parent participation is a requirement, often 100 percent of the time.

Changes in the community of Pangnirtung provide evidence of the positive effects of a supportive context. Whereas Looie Mike struggled on her own in the early 1990s, the community now has a well-established day care centre supported and monitored by the Department of Education of the newly formed territory of Nunavut (personal communication, Healey, Sweasy, 2000). As a result, Pangnirtung's Precious Children's Daycare can now join Iiyus Stluliqul [Happy Children] School in Duncan, British Columbia, and M'Chigiing Binoojiinh Gamgoonhs [West Bay Child Care Centre] in West Bay, Ontario — centres cited in the original RCAP report — as model programs that benefit from systems that support linkages with other services (Colbert, 1996, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

The results of this research highlighted the importance of program quality, comprehensiveness, community and parent involvement, and especially, infrastructure — a framework to provide communities with stability and support, including funding and technical assistance.

Recommendations arising from the original RCAP urged the establishment of a Canada-wide Aboriginal Child Care System, controlled by Aboriginal peoples and funded on a long-term basis, as well as an Aboriginal Early Childhood Research Institute to provide advice and support to the Aboriginal Child Care System.

In the meantime, the examples of Kenya and New Zealand illustrate the importance of focusing discussion — *before* programs are launched — on planning and policies to ensure that contextual factors, including a supportive infrastructure and community and family supports, are in place.

In addition, the need for additional research remains ongoing. It is particularly important to collect and coordinate basic information about current early childhood programs for Aboriginal peoples as well as the contextual factors that influence those programs in all countries of the world. It is also important to bring to light new knowledge about specific programs and their impact on children and families and, to test the validity of findings from mainstream settings when they are applied to Aboriginal communities.

Furthermore, although these examples and conclusions are drawn from Aboriginal communities, they are also instructive for both other cultural minorities and mainstream populations. They confirm the thesis that, for the most part, programs can only provide for effective developmental transitions when they receive support from contextual factors which, in turn, are supported by a framework or system that is endorsed by a broad social and political constituency.

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